



LL 138



# FRANCESCO MARIA VERACINI



SONATAS NOS 1.2.4.8

Hyman BRESS, violin

Jean Schrick, viola da gamba · Olivier Alain, harpsichord



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According to the famous music historian Dr. Charles Burney, Francesco Maria Veracini was "the greatest violinist in Europe". The facts of his life are known only in part and some of them are in dispute. Some historians give the date of his birth in Florence as 1685 and others give it as February 1, 1690. Veracini's uncle, Antonio, was a celebrated violinist and composer and his first teacher. He also studied with Giuseppe Antonio Bernabei. His first success was at Venice and in 1711, he created a stir when he played at Frankfurt during the festivities attendant upon the coronation of Charles VI, the Holy Roman Emperor. From this time, he became internationally famous as "*Il Fiorentino*". In 1714, he made his first trip to London, where the public was at the height of its craze for Italian music, brought about by Handel's first success with his opera *Rinaldo* in 1711. Veracini's first appearance was on January 23rd at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, when he performed between the acts of an opera, playing what contemporary records refer to as "symphonies". He continued to perform in this manner for a year and also played in Handel's orchestra on occasion during opera performances when, it was said, his powerful and unique tone clearly was audible above the other instruments. He also performed several times at concerts in Hickford's Room in James Street, sometimes with the brilliant and mysterious singer known only as The Baroness.

Subsequent historians have made much of the episode that occurred in 1716 and involved Giuseppe Tartini, the future great master of the violin. Tartini, some years younger than Veracini, had begun to make his reputation as a player and was invited to engage in a contest with Veracini during a fete to be given at Venice in honor of the visiting Elector of Saxony. However, before the event, Tartini went to Cremona to hear one of Veracini's concerts and was so intimidated by the brilliance of his playing that he failed to appear in Venice for the competition. Instead, he went into seclusion at Ancona for a period of intense study, from which he emerged with some of the technical and acoustical discoveries with which he was to revolutionize the violinist's art. Veracini later became violinist to the Elector of Saxony, who was also King of Poland, and resided at the court in Dresden from 1720 to 1723. On August 13, 1722, Veracini attempted suicide by jumping from a high window and was left lamed for life. Johann Mattheson, a contemporary historian, says that this was done in a fit of insanity brought on by overwork. The historian François-Jean Fétis, writing a century later, tells a different story. According to him, Veracini, who apparently was a vain and tempestuous man, had offended the Elector's *Kapellmeister*, Johann Pisandel, who arranged to humiliate him by challenging him to play at sight a difficult concerto which another player, who competed with Veracini, had been practising for weeks. The Elector gave the palm not to Veracini but the other man, which supposedly supplied the motive for his desperate act.

After leaving Dresden in 1723, Veracini was for a time in the service of Count Kinsky at Prague. Tartini was one of the Count's court musicians during the same period.

Though Veracini's set of remarkable violin sonatas was published at Dresden and Amsterdam in 1721, he did not gain much of a reputation as a composer until November 25, 1735 when his opera *Adriano* had its triumphant premiere at the King's Theatre, London. It was repeated 17 times, which was unusual at that time. The brilliant cast included the two famous *castrati* Farinelli and Senesino and the great soprano Francesca Cuzzoni. She it was who participated in the notorious hair-pulling encounter with her equally famous rival, Faustina Hasse, on stage during a London performance in 1726. Veracini later produced other operas, but with diminishing success. The fickle London public had found a new hero, the Italian composer-violinist Francesco Geminiani. Veracini went back to Italy and did not return to London until 1745, which is when Dr. Burney heard him perform at Hickford's Room in Brewer Street. Some historians say that Veracini died in London in 1750, but others claim that it was at Pisa. Some accounts tell the colorful story that after his last London appearances, Veracini went back to Italy and was shipwrecked on the way, losing all he possessed, including his two Stainer violins, which he referred to always as Peter and Paul.

Very little of Veracini's music was published in his lifetime. Many manuscripts were discovered after his death. His total output includes five operas, several concertos, two cantatas, sonatas for violin and flute, and symphonies for two violins, viola, cello, and doublebass with continuo. Of those works published in his lifetime, the violin sonatas are counted as opus 1 and another set of violin sonatas that he called *Sonate Accademiche* are opus 2, though composed twenty years later than the first set.

This recording of the Twelve Sonatas, opus 1, employs the Peters edition edited by Walter Kolneder. The musicologist H.J. Moser called these sonatas "some of the most remarkable and beautiful ones of their kind in the 18th century." It is interesting to realize that if Veracini actually was born in 1685, he was exactly contemporary with Bach and Handel, those two giants who for centuries to come put their most worthy contemporaries in the shade. Though violinists always have been partial to Veracini's sonatas, the concert-going public has listened to them dutifully rather than knowingly while waiting for the accepted profundities of Bach or the expected fireworks of later composers for the violin. Presently, however, there is a new interest in and sympathy for the underrated Italian composers who worked in the great tradition of Corelli and Vivaldi.

Edmund Van Der Straeten, a musicologist specializing in the violin literature, has written of Veracini. "As a composer he was too far in advance of his time to be understood by his contemporaries, who looked upon his work as capricious and bizarre. His bold modulations, the wealth of his delicately worked-out harmonies, his originality in expressing his conceptions, differed too widely from anything that had been heard before, with the result that for over a century his compositions were

entirely neglected." Of these twelve violin sonatas Van Der Straeten writes: "In form they show a progress over his predecessors, but it is especially in his thematic material, its bold harmonic treatment, and the characteristic chromatic passages, that he appears quite modern. Some of his slow movements are truly enchanting, while his allegros often fascinate by their brightness and natural flowing form... In the first movements of his sonatas he makes an important step forward towards the final sonata form."

The twelve violin sonatas best can be described by listing the markings of the separate movements. It can be seen that Veracini began with the conventional dance-derived forms and progressed into the newly evolved forms that today remain the accepted ones.

Victor Chapin

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- Sonata 1  
Overture - Aria - Paesana - Minuet - Gigue
- Sonata 2  
Preludio - Allemande - Siciliana - Grave - Aria
- Sonata 3  
Preludio - Allemande - Largo - Rondo
- Sonata 4  
Preludio - Allegro - Sarabande - Allegro
- Sonata 5  
Preludio - Courante - Aria - Gigue
- Sonata 6  
Fantasia - Allemande - Pastorale - Gigue
- Sonata 7  
Cantabile - Larghetto - Allegro - Largo - Allegro
- Sonata 8  
Largo - Allegro - Allegro - Grave - Allegro
- Sonata 9  
Largo e staccato - Allegro - Vivace - Largo - Allegro
- Sonata 10  
Largo - Allegro - Allegro - Largo - Brillante
- Sonata 11  
Cantabile - Allegro - Allegro - Largo - Allegro
- Sonata 12  
Cantabile - Larghetto - Intermedio (Aria) - Aria - Capriccio

HYMAN BRESS was born in Capetown, South Africa, where he began to play the violin at the age of five. He made his debut with the Capetown Municipal Orchestra when he was nine years old, and six years later won a scholarship to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, and was graduated in 1951.

In 1956, Mr. Bress won the Concert Artists Guild Award, and in 1957 the Jascha Heifetz Award at Tanglewood. A Canadian by citizenship, he appeared in radio, television, recital and orchestral appearances throughout Canada and was invited to make his debut in London with the Royal Philharmonic under Sir Adrian Boult.

Bress has toured Europe and Scandinavia, drawing 'rave' notices from the critics. He has played with such internationally famed orchestras as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, l'Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. He has also broadcast and appeared on television in many leading cities.

He possesses one of the finest violins in the world, a Guarnerius del Jesu, made in 1739.



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